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JUNE

Vol.
42

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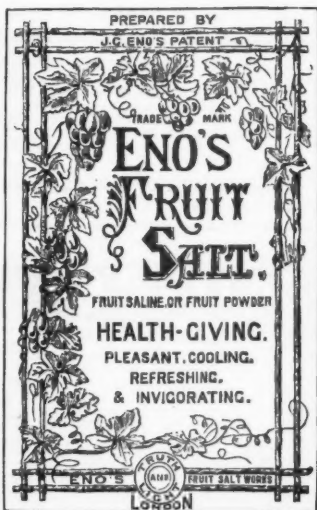
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CHARLES DICKENS

No. 1019, NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 1888.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

"A LEAL LASS."

BY RICHARD ASHE KING.

CHAPTER XXVIII. REPLEDGED.

By the next day's post the Vicar had a letter from Hugh to say that the appearance of his name in the newspapers in connection with Fred's accident had certified an old comrade at once of his existence and of his being in England. That this old comrade, Major Mason, F.R.G.S., being on the eve of starting on an expedition of sport and exploration to the centre of Africa, had telegraphed to ask if Hugh was "fit" and willing to join it, and that he, Hugh, had telegraphed back his assent. As he had his outfit to prepare and little time to get it together, he was compelled to quit Leeds for London that day, and to give up all hope of another visit to the Vicarage.

When the Vicar had read this surprising and disturbing news, he glanced across at May, and seeing her with an unopened letter clutched nervously in her hand, he said nothing. That letter also, he was quite sure, was from Hugh, and May would know the news soon enough without his communicating it to her abruptly and in her mother's hearing.

May, having made a feeble pretence at breakfasting, hurried off to her room to devour her letter in secret. She had the most certain forebodings of its being a final farewell, yet the reading of it was worse than her worst anticipations. The practical details of the when and where and why he was going made her realise his going more intensely. For the rest the letter protested that his life would be happier, and not more unhappy, through

his love for her, and the sweet sorrow of the remembrance of their old days together.

The effect of this letter upon May was like that of the sudden awakening of a somnambulist upon the brink of a precipice. All her reasons for abiding by her engagement—Gower's magnanimity, their deep indebtedness to him, her solemn promise to Fred, her vow as she had considered it—all were as a dream, as she realised that Hugh was lost to her for ever. In truth, the inevitable reaction had set in, and Hugh's letter was rather the occasion than the cause of a revulsion of feeling which, in the present state of her nerves, was overwhelming.

She would telegraph; he might not yet have quitted Leeds; or he might have left, before quitting it, his London address. She seized her hat and put it on, standing mechanically before the glass without seeing anything, and then hurried from her room.

Her father, who was pacing the study to and fro in agitated anxiety about her, hearing her quick step crossing the hall, opened the study-door to intercept her, as it were, accidentally.

"Going out, dear?" he asked, as casually as he could.

"Yes, father," she answered guiltily, and then turned to try, with feverish haste, to open the front door.

When, however, she had opened it, she closed it again impulsively, and turned back to say:

"I was going to telegraph to Hugh, father."

"Yes, dear; come in," he answered, leading the way into the study; when he had closed the door behind them he said again, but interrogatively: "Yes, dear?"

"He's going to Africa, and I want to see

him before he goes," she faltered with failing resolution, for a moment before she had made her mind up to confide to her father the proposal and rejection of yesterday, and her reconsideration and repentance of to-day.

"I fear he's gone, dear — to London, I mean; but you can telegraph on chance, or I could take the next train and see him, if he has not gone; and get, perhaps, his London address if he has."

"Yes, that would be better. You might ask him—or take a letter?" she asked, looking up into her father's face with a kind of piteous appeal for discreet and unquestioning assistance, which he understood and responded to.

"Yes, dear; you'll have plenty of time to write, as the next train does not go till 11.30."

She glanced at the clock.

"Perhaps I had better telegraph, too?" she said timidly, for these two hours' interval might make all the difference.

"I will telegraph while you write your letter, dear."

"Thank you, father," she said, putting her arms about his neck, and kissing him with a clinging kiss, which expressed the depth of her relief and gratitude for all that this delicately-proffered service meant to her.

"I shall just telegraph to him not to go till he sees me?" asked he.

"Yes," she replied hesitatively, fearing that this might not be a sufficiently intelligible or effective message.

"Or sees you?"

But May, woman-like, had room in her mind, even at this crisis, for a thought of the Mrs. Grundy of Hammersley—not inadequately represented by the young lady who worked the wires at the post-office.

"I would rather you sent it in your own name, father."

"Very well, dear," he said as he hurried from the room.

Then she returned upstairs to write her letter. Now, she thought with infinite relief, the die is cast; I cannot go back now if I would; therefore, I need not consider anything but my letter—only my letter. And, indeed, she did keep well at bay all yesterday's counter considerations—as considerations no longer; for the matter was decided, and the Rubicon crossed by her father's telegram to Hugh. Therefore, she let loose her whole pent-up heart in this letter to Hugh, without allowing a thought of either Fred or

Gower to divert or obstruct its full flow for a moment. Indeed, for the moment, she was almost possessed, so to say, with Hugh's sole image. She had fought so stubbornly against admitting it within her heart, that her forces of resistance were worn out when it carried the citadel at last, and so it reigned for the time in undisputed possession.

When she had almost finished the letter a knock came to the door, and the nurse entered at May's bidding. The moment May heard the knock she had a misgiving that it was the nurse coming—at this moment of all others—to summon her again, and on a similar errand, to Fred's bedside.

"Well?" she asked, with scared face, pressing her outspread hand upon her letter as though she feared an attempt to snatch it from her.

"Do you know where the Vicar is, miss?" the nurse asked, in a grave voice.

"Why? What's the matter? He's just gone to the post-office. Is anything the matter?" asked May, in sudden alarm.

"The doctor would like to see him, miss."

"He's worse!"

"I don't know that he's worse, miss; he's a bit weaker, his pulse is gone a bit."

May had started up and was now looking with wide eyes of fear and enquiry into the concerned face of the nurse.

"But he was better early this morning."

"He seemed a shade better, but he's lost it, miss, and something more."

May looked at the nurse without seeing her for some seconds, and said then: "I shall see the doctor and ask him to wait. My father will be here in a few minutes now."

"Yes, miss."

When the nurse had left the room May locked up her letter in her desk, with a passing thought of exceeding bitterness that it might never be sent. Having locked it out of sight, she gave all her thoughts to Fred. The nurse's manner was much more serious than her words, and gave the impression of a grave crisis in Fred's condition. Therefore, May was prepared for the doctor's concerned face, and his alarming suggestion that his Leeds colleague should be telegraphed for forthwith.

"There is no immediate danger, my dear young lady—none whatever; but it's a special case of, I may say, public im-

portance, and I feel the responsibility—I feel the responsibility."

In other words, though May fortunately did not so understand him, there might be an inquest, and Dr. Jibblett feared to stand solely responsible in the eye of the world for the fatal termination of a case which seemed—or would seem to outsiders—so simple.

"He appears to have been a good deal agitated both last night and this morning," the doctor continued, looking at the nurse for confirmation, to her obvious embarrassment.

"I was telling the doctor, miss, how he took on about that gentleman who was here. Mrs. Beresford was talking again about him this morning."

"Just so, just so. It would be better, I think, on the whole, to avoid speaking to him on exciting subjects at present," the doctor pronounced, as though deciding between two fairly-balanced eligible alternatives. "However, I should not be prepared to say," continued the doctor, thinking still of a possible inquest, "that the change in him this morning is due altogether to agitation of any kind. It is a serious case, my dear young lady, as we assured you from the first—a very serious case, and he has got on up to this better than we expected. There is a check this morning certainly, but it may be nothing—the slip of a single step back, my dear young lady. Still, it would be more satisfactory to your father, and, may I add, to myself, to have Dr. Leat called in again for consultation."

The little doctor talked on a good deal in the same strain, and to similar effect, with the utmost self-complacency, thinking more of his own eloquence than of its effect upon May. Indeed, he fancied that he had done his work very gently as regards May, and he indemnified himself by speaking much more plainly to the Vicar when he appeared.

Thus it happened that all thought of seeking Hugh in Leeds, and indeed almost all thought of Hugh, was put out of the Vicar's head. The doctor had said to him in almost as many words that Fred was sinking, and the poor Vicar hurried back to the post-office in a frenzy of anxiety to telegraph for Dr. Leat.

Meanwhile Hugh had fallen into the background of May's mind also. From her father's face and manner she could see that Dr. Jibblett had given him even a worse account of Fred than that he had

given her. Beyond a doubt he was in an exceedingly critical condition, if he was not absolutely dying, and she took her place by his bed, with a sense of standing within the very shadow of death.

Of this, however, Fred himself had not an idea. He spoke to May about many things—and his mind wandered quickly with all the discursiveness and inconsequence of weakness, from one thing to another—among other things, he spoke to her with perfect confidence of being up and well in a few days. He was very gentle with her; gentler than she had ever known him to be in all her life, and very grateful to her—a still more singular mood of mind in him. Again and again he recurred to her promise to keep, for his sake, to her engagement to Gower, speaking of it as his salvation, and as the crowning act of her life-long goodness to him.

"It's done more for me than the doctors, Em; a long way more. I don't believe I should have got better but for it; and I shouldn't have cared to get better either—a poor one-legged beggar, fit for nothing."

Here he rambled away about the cruel ill-luck of such an accident to a fellow like him, just cut out for the stirring life he was starting for in California. From this he wandered with a passing growl to Hugh, and from him he returned, as he did from every subject, to May's goodness of all kinds to him, and especially to this last instance of it. To this he would recur again and again in almost the same words, without any consciousness, seemingly, of his having spoken of it before.

It was no use for May to remonstrate with him for talking so incessantly and incontinently; nothing could stop him. She tried leaving him in the nurse's charge; but he would have neither her nor his mother, but only May, by his bed, while this mood lasted. As a last resource, May ventured to hint that the doctor did not think him so well this morning, and that he had attributed the falling back to the patient's over-exciting himself by too much talking.

"Jibblett's a pompous ass! If talk killed any one he would have been dead ages ago. His notion of doctoring is to serve you with a pint of physic per day—like a milkman. Thundering idiot!" But presently he asked, turning frightened eyes on May: "What did he say?"

"He thought you were a little weaker, dear, that's all."

"Is that what kept him here this morning?"

"Yes," May answered hesitatingly. Then, thinking it better to break Dr. Leat's approaching visit to him, she added: "He's not used, I think, to cases of this kind; so we're going to have Dr. Leat again."

"Jibblett wanted him, do you mean?"

"He thought it as well to have him."

"But he suggested it?"

"Yes; I think, as you say, he doesn't feel easy about cases that don't need medicine; he's not used to them."

Fred, it will be seen, now had his wits more together and concentrated through a sudden excitement. After thinking things over a little, and putting together indications the significance of which had escaped him before, he said:

"He thinks me very ill?" looking at May.

"Not very ill, dear. What he said was, that you had over-excited yourself, and slipped a step back."

Fred turned away his face, and remained for some time perfectly still. Presently he said, with his face still averted:

"Have you sent for the other man?"

"Yes, dear."

After another pause, he turned his head round on the pillow, and said tremulously:

"May, you will tell me what he says?"

"Of course, dear," she answered lightly, resolving mentally not to hear from any one all that the doctor said, if it promised to be alarming.

After another and longer silence, during which he remained so still, with closed eyes, that May hoped he slept, he said falteringly:

"I—I don't want to die, Em.—I'm not fit."

"Fred, dear, you're weak and depressed from over-excitement, and so have got this idea into your head. I do wish, dear, you would try and rest, and you'll be yourself again when the doctor comes."

Without intending it, May had suggested an odd but effective motive for quieting him. Feeling as a man who waits for the verdict, he wished to look and to be his best when the doctor came—as though the doctor's opinion could alter his state either way. He therefore closed his eyes and tried to sleep; but thick-thronging fears and fancies of all kinds kept him excitedly wakeful.

"May, you would like me to get better,

wouldn't you?" he asked eagerly, as one of these fancies flitted through his brain.

"Oh, Fred!"

"Well, I mean that you would feel released from your promise, if I didn't get better, wouldn't you?"

"My promise?" she stammered.

"To marry Gower. You wouldn't feel bound to keep your promise to me to marry him if—I died?" he asked tremulously.

"Oh, Fred! don't, don't!"

"But would you? Tell me," he persisted, with childish eagerness.

"I would, if you wanted me," she cried desperately.

"Just as much as if I got better?" he continued urgently.

"Yes."

After a pause he said, as if in adequate explanation of all this excited earnestness:

"I want you to wish me to get better, May;" and, indeed, this was the childish idea at the bottom of his mind, to have May's wishes—which meant, he knew, her prayers—with him at this crisis. In an illness that affects the nerves, the mind often becomes as childish, in its weakness, as the body.

May, however, felt that she had repledged herself more solemnly even than before, to keep to her engagement to Gower, under any circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIX. CONFESSION.

DR. LEAT, after careful examination and enquiries, pronounced Fred to be doing fairly well—quite as well as he had expected—and was plainly of an opinion (which professional etiquette prevented him from expressing plainly) that Dr. Jibblett was fussy and foolish in alarming the household.

"What you want," he said cheerily enough to Fred, "is a good mental aperient 'to cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.' You've been exciting and worrying yourself about something, and the mind is like the stomach, it will give you no peace till you've rid it of what troubles it. Eh?"

To the Vicar he said: "Your son is as unstrung as a fiddle with a broken bridge. All he wants is bracing, which he can get, when he's fit to move, by a month or two at Blackpool, and a course of tonics. And

he'll soon be fit to move, I imagine; probably in another fortnight."

The real patient in the house, apparently, was May; at least, the doctor gave her more of his time and attention than Fred. He had been immensely struck with her beauty upon his first visit, and he was hardly less struck now by the change he perceived in her. Much to her amazement he turned upon her and insisted upon invaliding her. His pleasant peremptoriness and her father's aroused anxiety about her compelled her to lie down at least for some hours—for she had to confess to a racking headache.

Now Fred, being as the doctor said, utterly unstrung, and having his mind wholly prepossessed with the idea of his danger, read everything the wrong way. He was certainly dying. His mother's distress; his father's anxiety; the consultation of the doctors; Dr. Leat's unconsidered quotation about "cleansing the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart;" May's absence under the plea of illness; all were fuel to the fear that consumed him—especially May's absence. What did her sudden illness mean? Simply that she had promised to tell him all the doctor had said, and that the doctor had pronounced him sinking; but had warned them all against destroying any possibility of a rally by informing him of his critical condition. Therefore May, who would hold her promise to him sacred, had to be kept out of the way under this pretext of illness.

Thus it happened that all their reassurances of the doctor's cheerful view of his case failed of their effect upon Fred. He was prepared to discredit them, and he did not dare to question even the nurse particularly, lest he might hear the fatal verdict he feared.

He brooded upon this idea that he was dying till the terror of it, in his utterly unnerved state, overpowered him. As night deepened, this horror of a great impending darkness deepened with it, till he could endure it no longer alone and unsupported. He sent the nurse, in the small hours of the morning, for his father, and when he came, he desired that they should be left alone together. When the nurse had quitted the room, he amazed his father by asking him for those spiritual ministrations which he had doggedly declined up to this.

After the Vicar had read and prayed with him, he talked to him so unaffectedly

and affectionately, that Fred was moved not only to tears—which did not mean much in his state—but to a qualified confession of the follies which had been weighing heavier and yet heavier upon his conscience for the last few hours.

Among the rest, he told the whole story of the forgery in a curiously modified form, making out that Gower was himself somehow partly to blame for it. When he came to his account of the pressure put by himself and Gower upon May, he took care that his friend should cut at least as poor a figure as he deserved to make in the transaction. He had a vague, illogical, but perfectly human feeling that he somehow raised himself by reducing Gower to his level. As for the suppressions and modifications of a confession which he thought was being made on his death-bed, and which he professed was being made without reserve, these also were thoroughly human. There are not many confessions made, even at the foot of the gallows, wherein something is not held back or misrepresented.

To return, however, to Fred and his confession, he mentioned in it incidentally the promise he had extorted from May to keep to her engagement, and begged his father to let her know that he absolved her from it.

"You can tell her yourself to-morrow, Fred."

"To-morrow!" he faltered, turning a look like that of a hunted creature upon his father. "I don't think I shall live till to-morrow."

His father's reassurances on this point he answered only by a gloomy shake of the head, when the Vicar quoted what the doctor had said, to which Fred objected that, if the doctor had spoken so favourably—or favourably at all—of his case, May would not have kept out of the way. She had promised to report to him all the doctor had said, and, because she found that she dare not tell him all, she had pretended to be ill.

"I assure you, Fred," his father said earnestly, "the doctor thought her looking so ill that he insisted upon her going to bed. Well," he added, seeing Fred to be still unconvinced, "she shall speak for herself." When he got to the door he paused and returned to say: "I shouldn't disturb her if I were not sure that both you and she will be the better for seeing each other. She will tell you exactly what I have told you as to Dr. Leat's opinion, and you will

make her as happy by absolving her from that promise."

As he looked for some assent, Fred nodded, and, after his father's departure, he kept his eyes fixed feverishly upon the door.

It was not long before May appeared hurrying in in her dressing-gown—her very air of eager cheerfulness assuring Fred of his reprieve.

"He doesn't think you in any danger at all, Fred," she cried, as she neared the bed. On reaching it, she stooped to kiss him effusively, and continued, "He said I was the real patient; as for you, you're to be in Blackpool in a fortnight, and as well as ever you were in a month, really," she added, nodding emphatically.

Fred drew a long breath of relief.

"I thought you kept away because of your promise, Em. I knew you would keep it." Then he proceeded to speak of her other promise, not only absolving her from it but explaining why he absolved her. He said that on serious second thoughts he was convinced that Gower was unworthy of her, and would not make her happy! In fact, he resumed at once his character of a magnanimous brother, feeling quite secure of his father's keeping his confession secret—by request, which would be made to-night, or early to-morrow.

As it turned out, however, the Vicar declined altogether to allow May to continue in the belief of Mr. Gower's magnanimity.

"Your sister's happiness should be your first thought, and she will be miserable in the belief that she has behaved badly to such a man as she imagines him to be."

As Fred in his confession had minimised to insignificance the part he himself had played in tricking May into the engagement, he could not now urge that to unmask Gower was to unmask himself, to May. Wherefore, he was reduced to sullen silence, and to secret and bitter repentance of his confession.

Thus all was made right to every one, except to Fred—whose remorse for his maudlin penitence made him morose and unapproachable for weeks—and to Gower, who revenged himself for May's abominable ill-usage of him in the way Fred had feared he would—by informing the Vicar of the forgery.

The Vicar's first telegram to Hugh did not reach him, but another, addressed to him, "care of Secretary, R.G.S.," brought

him back to the Vicarage within a few hours; and he found "golden joys" nearer than Africa.

Intense was the excitement in Hammerley on its being noised abroad that Miss May was engaged again. Engaged to two men within almost as few weeks!

On her first appearance in the parish after the report had been spread and confirmed, she was waylaid by a knot of old ladies, who greeted her in the following engaging fashion, without, however, the slightest intention of offence:

"Eh, Miss May! Yo've gi'en yon barrowknight t' sack, an' takken t' other i' his place, they tell me. Weel, aw hope thee's fitted this time, lass. Thee'd hardly tried t' other 'un on, aw reckon."

"Happen, shoo'd heeard he wadn't wash," suggested another facetiously.

"But he'd coomed in for a mort o' brass, hadn't he, miss?" asked a third, who plainly thought all such explanations of Gower's rejection inadequate in face of this overpowering consideration.

"You know nothing whatever about it," May said good-humouredly, too happy to be hurt, "and I'm not going to tell you anything about it either," she added laughing, and nodding a parting salute.

But in escaping Scylla she struck upon Charybdis, for, a few steps further on, she was arrested by Miss Hick's frenzied tapping at the window. Miss Hick could hardly have been more highly elated if bigamy had been brought home to Mr. Spratt.

"Which is it, my dear? Which is it!" she gasped the moment May entered the room.

"It's Mr. Grey at present," May answering smiling. She thought it best to take the bull by the horns; and, indeed, there was no other possible way of foiling Miss Hick.

"At present!" exclaimed the old lady, hardly believing her own ears.

May nodded.

"If you mean my engagement, Miss Hick."

Miss Hick gazed at her in speechless amazement.

"It's some joke," she was able to say at last.

"It's not, indeed, Miss Hick. I'm engaged to Mr. Grey, and I mean to bring him soon to see you and receive your congratulations."

"May, you accepted him in a huff. You had some quarrel with Mr. Gower, and

Mr. Grey came just in the nick of time, and you took him to spite the other. Didn't you now?" she asked triumphantly.

May put her finger mysteriously to her lips.

"Hush! You mustn't tell. I daren't bring him to see you if you tell tales," she said smiling with almost paralyzing coolness.

The poor old lady was utterly bewildered, and was tormented with such a thirst of curiosity that she called in Con in the evening, as he passed her window on his return from his work. It was not by any means the first time that she had pumped what she took for valuable Vicarage news out of this guileless and garrulous creature.

"Good evening, O'Neil."

"Good evening kindly, miss, an' I hope it's bether I see you."

"I'm very well, thank you. And so you're going to have a wedding at the Vicarage, O'Neil?"

"So I undhershtand, miss. There isn't many wid your sinse, miss, to know whin they're well off—there isn't so."

"But Miss May is going to be very well off from all I hear."

"More of that soart to her, miss."

"But he's a good match, isn't he, O'Neil? Better than Mr. Gower—or Sir George Gower, I should say now?"

"Sorra a wan of me knows, miss."

"But why did she give him up then?"

"Ay, there it is, miss."

"They say there was a quarrel. You didn't hear anything of it, O'Neil?"

"Sorra a word, miss."

"Some say she was engaged when she was a child to this Mr. Grey, who was supposed to be dead."

"See that now!" Con cried as a note of admiration.

"But what do they say at the Vicarage, O'Neil?"

"Ah, shure, miss, they hears nothin' up at the Vicarage," Con answered with an air of the most perfect innocence, suggesting that the Vicarage was the last place from which to get news of this kind.

"But they talk freely to an old servant like you, O'Neil," rejoined Miss Hick coaxingly, for she had no suspicion of the sarcasm of Con's suggestion.

"That's what the Vicar says. 'Con,' he says, 'I tell you anything,' he says, 'be-kase you tells no wan nothin'.' 'Arrah thin, yere rivrence,' I says, 'there's no one wan to tell nothin' to in this place,' I says, 't.r. begorra, they knows every-

thing about ye afore ye know it yerself,' I says. An' that's as thrue as ye're sittin' there, miss," Con added, looking solemnly at Miss Hick, as though she could hardly be expected to credit such gossipmongering. Then rising suddenly—for Miss Hick had insisted on his seating himself—he said with an abrupt change of tone to one of concentrated sarcastic bitterness:

"Good night, miss, an' thank ye," and without another word he quitted the room and the house.

Not until after he had been gone some time did it dawn upon Miss Hick, that his thanks were ironically intended for the news she had imparted to him; and that he had been audaciously sarcastic throughout the interview. In fact, Con, being furious at the freedom taken with May's name in Hammersley, was glad to relieve himself of this bit of wholesome sarcasm, which the old lady might digest at her leisure.

In spite, however, of Con's discretion, it got out through another Vicarage servant, that May's engagement to Gower was the price of Fred's extication at Gower's expense from some horrible scrape; and that Fred's confession, upon what he thought to be his death-bed, of this scrape to his father, had freed May honourably from the insupportable entanglement. Mrs. Beresford, who next to Fred himself was most interested in keeping the secret, had most to do with divulging it, through such indiscreet and reiterated defence of Fred (in the servant's hearing), as suggested bit by bit the whole story.

Fred, however, affected to believe Hugh the informer, and his incessant sneers at the man who had saved his life at the risk of his own almost completely disenchanted May with her once idolised brother.

Hugh, on the other hand, crowned Fred's detestation of him by providing a livelihood for the life he had saved. He succeeded, through his influence with some friends abroad, in securing Fred a lucrative agency.

It needs a magnanimous man to be grateful for magnanimity, whereas Fred was below even that level of human nature which repays with hatred benefits it cannot repay in kind.

Mrs. Beresford became reconciled to the loss of the Gower title and estates through the reports that reached her, from time to time, of the vicious excesses and wild extravagances of Sir Augustus Gower, who took—among other follies—to theatre-

managing, and married eventually the saucy "soubrette" of his farces—a marriage which turned out excellently.

Hugh settled down contentedly, after the manner of so many adventurous youths, to the uneventful life of a country gentleman. He was a keen sportsman, a headlong hunter, and, above all—in his own estimation—his wife's husband.

He had an unshaken belief in May's literary genius, who, he thought, would certainly have astonished the world with fiction as good as George Eliot's, or with poetry as good as Mrs. Browning's, if she had not given up to her husband and children what was meant for mankind.

May's better-grounded reverence for the rough virtues of his manliness was not less settled and profound. Their chief quarrels were about their boys, whom Hugh, oddly enough, would have kept to their books, when May wished them in the woods with their father. They had their quarrels and their troubles, of course, but love survived them, and drew from them increased sweetness, as the sun draws a richer incense from the flowers while wet with the tears of a passing storm.

READING AND ITS BISCUITS.

As the train slackens speed on approaching Reading—the Great Western down train that is—you may gain a momentary glimpse of the environments of the place, such a scene as the traveller of old along the western road might have enjoyed in more leisurely fashion. Here are beautiful green meadows; there the River Thames winds in silvery folds; a cluster of roofs and spires rises from the green plain; hills show beyond in hazy distance, suggesting the approach to a land differing somewhat from the great metropolitan area with which we are familiar; the land of the West, indeed, of which Reading may be regarded as the frontier town. Then we get a nearer view of the town, its works, and public buildings, its grey old church towers, and bright new stores and shops, as the train glides into the station.

A few centuries ago, the first view of Reading would perhaps from a distance have been more imposing. The minster tower of its great abbey would have dominated the scene, with halls and cloisters adjoining, with embattled gates and massive walls. Then should we have heard bells chiming continually from abbey,

from friary, from church and guild chapel. In the narrow streets, with the tall timber houses in overhanging stages almost shutting out the light of day, we might have met some stately pageant from the abbey walls; the Abbot in his glittering cope, preceded by the great processional cross, and followed by the stately Benedictine fathers. Or it might be some procession of the guilds, with jolly clothiers and dignified merchants walking behind their banners. Or, crossing over the high-arched bridge, we might have met a train of pack-horses from the West Country, laden with wool and cloth for the halls and markets of London.

Then you might have seen along the strand of the sparkling Kennet, women with tubs and baskets, beating clothes and whitening linen in the running stream. It may be that the King is at the abbey, and that the Royal linen is bleaching in the river, for His Majesty is often at the abbey in his progresses, and the great banqueting hall is the scene of Royal feasts, of councils, and even of Parliaments.

But the grand yet sombre features of other days are replaced by the cheerful briskness of the present. Instead of monks and friars we have the Board School children in procession, and children's voices and the songs they sing in unison, replace the echoing drone of long-drawn anthems. For to-day everything is modern about Reading. Brisk, clean, and flourishing, the town has regained all, and something more, of its ancient prosperity. In summer, the surrounding fields are carpeted in rainbow colours, with myriads of flowers, which bloom not unseen, nor merely to decay, but to furnish seeds, destined to make bright the gardens of great London, and other parts remote and near. More homely, too, but with the beauty of utility, are the wide plantations of the vegetables of the market-gardener and agriculturalist, which blossom, too, after their fashion, and transmit their virtues, enhanced by a judicious selection, to a future race of bigger cabbages, of more prolific beans, of turnips wider in girth, of potatoes more floury and better flavoured.

But, great as it is in seeds, Reading has a still more important product, which has carried its name and fame all over the round world. It is the biscuit that gives the place its pre-eminence—the toothsome, useful, always acceptable, and with pleasure-

to-be-munched, biscuit. English biscuits everywhere carry the palm; even the French, who are apt to plume themselves upon superiority in all things edible, confess that our biscuits are not to be beaten; and of English biscuits Reading is the chiefest and most famous fount.

When you have once reached Reading, it is not hard to find the great biscuit factory. "Indade, ye can't miss it," says an Irish labourer, who is at work with a barrow and a broom, sweeping up and making tidy, where already everything seems tolerably neat and clean. But to make sure, the friendly Irishman leaves his barrow and broom to work by themselves for a few moments, while he leads the way to a point where the buildings are unmistakably in evidence, the rows of square chimneys, the clustered roofs, the tall, round columns, which are to the other chimneys as the high towers of the abbey were to the pinnacles about its roofs.

Yet, when you have reached the works, you are not there altogether. A wide gateway opens; but that is not the way in; a river is crossed, the Kennet, flowing tranquilly as a canal with a barge or two lying moored to some quiet wharf. The river disappears, is swallowed up as it were in the biscuit factory; bridged across and arched over, with covered roofs and flying passages leading to and fro. Then there is another gateway; and that is also closed to strangers. Still you may be sure you are on the right track. For there rises a slight fume from the rows of lesser chimneys which spreads abroad with a flavour of the spice islands, with a grateful incense, as of the baking-day of youth, when all kinds of cakes were in preparation for some household feast. And so, soothed by pleasant odours, you pursue your way, till, finally passing into another street in what seems to be quite a different quarter of the town, there you are—at the door of the chief offices.

When you see counting-houses and private offices stretching out into the distance, with an array of busy clerks, and telephone boxes, and telegraphic machines, and other devices for saving time and labour, you begin to realise the importance of the biscuit, and of its manufacture as carried on at Reading.

Fifty years ago there were biscuits, no doubt, and of sorts. The great Abernethy had bequeathed his biscuit to dyspeptic humanity; there were captain's biscuits and ship's biscuit, and if you turn to the

volume of the "Penny Magazine" for 1840, you will find a description of biscuit making by machinery; of biscuits for the Royal Navy, that is, which was carried on at Gosport. Then, too, as now, certain towns had a reputation for certain choice morsels in the way of cakes, or gingerbread. But the business was altogether local and trifling; a branch of the confectioner's art and nothing more. Now the biscuit is universal. The square tins are seen piled in every shop that deals in comestibles, whether in town or country; and, in spite of hostile tariffs and national prejudices, it finds its way to every part of the world. Thus the biscuit works at Reading have grown with time and opportunity; the marvellous improvements in means of communication; the growth of the mechanic arts have brought about an equal growth and improvement in this particular manufacture.

Still the earlier methods are not entirely superseded; and that we may realise the difference between new and old, we are first introduced into the older factory, where the machinery and processes are the most simple. Here is a long range of ovens—the regular old-fashioned bakers' ovens heated directly from the flues—charged with their proper batches of cakes and biscuits, and then closed till the baking is completed. Here, too, is a man at work with a rolling-pin, and youths are cutting out biscuits with a shape, while the savour of the baking and the handsome appearance of the results, leave nothing to be desired. Here the machinery is confined to the kneading process. Above are the mixing rooms, and down a metal funnel are poured into the machines the materials of each batch carefully weighed and supplied according to formulas, the efficiency of which have been tested by long experience. Then the knives and beaters do their work, and presently the dough is turned out in one uniform homogeneous mass.

But a few steps further bring us into a scene of stir and activity, as if we had cleared a quarter of a century at a bound. Shafts are whirling overhead, and wheels revolving in all directions; huge cylinders are silently rolling round; and on all sides radiate long vistas of machinery—everywhere whirling wheels and swiftly-moving bands. The ways among this labyrinth of machinery are so many tramways laid with grooved rails, along which trucks are rolling to and fro, loaded with all kinds of

biscuit ware. And now you may watch the biscuit travelling through its various stages, the biscuit of the period, untouched by human hands, only watched and occasionally directed, as it passes without haste, but without much leisure for reflection, along its allotted path. First there are the materials pouring down from the mixing-room, and speedily converted into dough by the remorseless arms of bright and polished machinery. Then the mass of dough passes under one huge cylinder, and assumes the form of a massive sheet—of a blanket rather of portentous thickness. But it travels on, and another roller stretches it out and smooths it down. Backwards and forwards it passes, doubled and folded and squeezed again into tenuity, is gauged and measured, and passes out of the exact thickness or thinness required, whether that of a wafer, or of a portly "captain." The sheet of dough, which is as soft and clean as a sheet of paper just reeled off the machine, does not enjoy much respite before it reaches another stage in its progress.

It is impossible to help seeing analogies in this biscuit manufacture to other mechanical processes, and this next stage suggests strongly cylinder printing. Only the biscuit machine seems even cleverer than the printing machine. For with the latter, the sheet of paper you put in comes out still a sheet of paper, although covered with characters. But the biscuit machine takes the sheet of dough, cuts it into circles, perforates each with the holes appropriate to biscuits, imprints the name of the biscuit and the name of the manufacturer, and finally delivers the biscuit—complete, except for the "cuit"—in sets upon tins perforated or otherwise; but, anyhow, upon proper baking-tins ready to be popped into the oven.

This question of the oven, by the way, was a difficulty in the early days of the manufacture. It is discussed in the number of the "Penny Magazine" already alluded to. The biscuits first placed in the oven naturally got the most baking, and by the time the oven was filled the first might be ready to come out before the later arrivals were hot. The master-baker of the Government factory cunningly met this professional crux by making the earlier biscuits thicker, and gradually diminishing the rest. But this would not do for the modern manufacturer; each biscuit is the exact fellow of the rest, in size, and hue, and form, and perfect

uniformity in the baking process is secured by the hot air ovens to which we are now introduced. There are no wide-opening doors, breathing forth scorching heat; no roaring furnaces; no half-naked perspiring men alternately shovelling and stoking, as in the ovens of old times. There is plenty of heat, indeed; but it is mostly confined to the interior of the long and square tabernacle of white brickwork that forms one of a row of many similar structures occupying the floor of what may be called the Hall of Ovens. In the face of the tabernacle appears a long and narrow horizontal opening, like the slit of a gigantic letter-box, or, rather, a series of such slits, in front of which revolves a cylinder that gives motion to an endless band. The band travels continuously into the interior of the tabernacle, by way of the slit, bearing upon it the contents of the trays of biscuits, not yet "cuited," which have just been delivered from the cutting, stamping, and pricking-machine close by.

There they go in endless procession, these biscuits of the future, their walk being regulated to a nicety as well as the temperature of the hot-air chamber through which they pass. Thus, by the time we reach the other end of the tabernacle, the circles of dough, whose progress we watched just now, are dropping out in an endless shower from their endless band, all brown, a golden, straw-coloured brown, crisp and fragrant, and each one the moral of the other, as far as unprofessional eyes can judge. It is like the shower of letters seen from the inner side of the great slits of the General Post Office, only the shower is more regular, and never ends in the tornado or tempest that heralds the approach of closing time for letter-boxes. Like the letters, too, in the post office, the biscuits, as the receptacles into which they fall are filled up, are hurried away to the sorting-rooms, where they are weighed, inspected, and finally packed into tins.

So we may see the produce of many dozens of ovens whirling along into their final stages; they come loaded up on trucks, and roaring along the miniature tram lines; they fly upwards in lifts; they are whirled aloft in what may be called the overhead skyline. Here a pair of tall cages are hurrying from a wire rope, and receive the train of trucks piled high with trays of biscuits and cakes. A signal is given, and away goes the load, swinging high overhead like a tight-rope dancer taking his perilous walk head downwards. Half-way

up the train meets a couple of cages on the downward grade, charged with empty trays. But there is no danger of a collision; and while one set deposits its load softly on the floor, the other disappears among the galleries and chambers of the upper regions.

As you may suppose, there are many kinds of biscuits whose shape and structure do not fit them for production by the cylinder machines.

Here are rows of shining barrels like those of machine guns, from which, however, issue no deadly missiles, but, instead, a continuous volley of crinkled paste, which is cut into lengths by gauge and mould, and then dismissed in the direction of the ovens.

Other makes are done in moulds; there are alphabetical biscuits by whose aid the child may learn and then digest its lesson, the most pleasant of all the roads to knowledge; there are zoological biscuits, too, dogs, and cats, lions, elephants, and kangaroos, all to be pleasantly crunched, whether carnivorous or herbivorous; also the universal nic nacs which might serve as small change if an international biscuit currency were once established.

But there are some two hundred and fifty different biscuits in general use; and most people have their own particular favourites. Still there are biscuits that have won and retained the general suffrage, and are baked in their hundreds of thousands to the others' tens; and these are mostly of the plainer sorts—the Osborne, the lunch, the biscuit of middle-age as it were; while the mixed and fancy biscuits, the sweet and sugared ones, are the delight of youth.

And what about gingerbread, which holds a position half-way between the utile and the dulce? We may own to a weakness for ginger-nuts, the taste of which brings to memory the jolly country fairs of the old days, with the turmoil, the laughter, the booths and shows, with clown and pantaloon, the cavaliers in russet boots and feathered hats, and the lovely houris in tinselled skirts who strutted to and fro upon the stage.

The [ginger-nuts of the fair were often deficient in flavour and far from being of nutty crispness. They make them better now, and it is interesting to see how it is done. There is an enormous metal bowl revolving briskly on its axis, and the ingredients are rolled and compounded by a bright, revolving, metal cylinder within.

A man, wielding a great, wooden shovel, stands by the brink, and assists the amalgamating process. He is one of the veterans of the establishment, but he wields his shovel with all the vigour of youth, combined with the dexterity of long practice.

Another form of biscuit takes a peculiar development. This is the cracknel in all its various forms, with its brown and polished surface, and snowy, mealy interior. This result is obtained by boiling the biscuits first, and then baking them. The boiling house is an apartment to itself, with a huge cauldron of water bubbling and leaping from the effects of a powerful jet of steam which is driven through it.

A truck-load of biscuits, in the form of paste, is thrown into the cauldron; they disappear; they are altogether lost to sight in the torrid depths. The experiment has failed you think, the biscuits are boiled to a pulp perhaps, and will never more be seen. Then, suddenly, and almost simultaneously, like a shoal of fish, they dart glittering to the surface. There is one at hand with a fishing-net, a regular landing-net of reticulated wire. It is fishing in troubled waters, and the biscuits dart about as if possessed of life. But he brings them dexterously to bank like so many shining roach or glittering bleak, and drops his catch gently into a reservoir of cold water by his side.

And then they rest for a moment, poised on the surface of the water, and then drop like stones to the bottom. After these violent experiences they are ranged once more on trays, and pass through the ordeal of fire in the ovens, coming forth the light and elastic biscuit we all know so well.

After these experiences we may wander through the rooms where the biscuits are sorted and made up. And here we are reminded of the Mint—for a biscuit, one of Huntley and Palmers' biscuits, is like a sovereign. It must be perfect in shape and colour, and true to standard. Too brown, or too pale, or in any way defective in form, the biscuit is rejected and thrown on one side. These rejected are broken up and sold as fragments. Then there is the filling of the tins, the weighing, the labelling. When the biscuit is fairly finished, when it has passed the standard, and is ranked with its myriads of other comrades, there are three principal ways, in either of which its destination may lie. There is the Home Department, store-rooms filled with the square tins that are so well known

all over the United Kingdom. There is the Continental Department, with labels and packages varied, to suit the tastes of the European world. And there is the Export Branch, where the tins are of a different shape and differently handled, for they are all soldered up and hermetically closed, so that they may cross the line and visit the tropics, or travel into furthest India, or visit Tokio or Peking, without fear of deterioration. To every part of the world indeed the biscuits of Reading find their way.

The stencil-plates that line the sides of the export store-rooms, would furnish a lesson in geography, and a skilled examiner might himself be posed in the process.

Then the packing chests, as may be imagined, are the subject of a considerable industry. There are carpenters' shops, where boxes are turned out by truck loads; there is a cooperage for casks. There is also an engineer's shop, where the machinery used in the works is put together and repaired. There is a big sugar store, with mills for grinding sugar, and engine-rooms where bright and beautiful engines are at work, which furnish power for the whole machinery. And to see the flour stores!—great rooms with perhaps a thousand sacks of flour in sight, with floor over floor above, supported on the stoutest of iron columns. Merrily must whirl the mill wheel about Reading, for the sacks we notice are of local millers; and how much of local prosperity and general well-being is due to such a famous and flourishing industry, the amazing success of which is chiefly owing to thorough excellence and honesty of manufacture.

And now we have reached the last stage of all. The biscuit is about to start on its travels. A roomy store-house is well filled with boxes and cases of every description, some marked with devices in the way of diamonds and stars, and mysterious initials, which stevedores and ship officers know the secret of; others bear the address of well-known English towns. Through the middle of the store-house runs a railway siding, and a small train of trucks—full-sized trucks these, of the massive English pattern—are waiting to be loaded. A couple of locomotives are puffing in the distance, shunting and bumping about other trucks, which are in the business too, only in some other department. Assuredly the place is big, and a walk all round is something of a pedestrian feat. Fourteen acres laid out in buildings, with passages to and

fro, staircases and ladders to climb, and bridges to negotiate; all this measured out forms a pretty good exercise ground. And then there is the continual clatter and whirl of machinery.

You might also expect that there would be dust, that you would leave the works as white as a miller. But this is not the case. You, sir, may come in your finest broad-cloth; and you, madame, in your best velvet bonnet, and your garments will be none the worse for your visit. The ventilation must be excellent, as there is no dust, neither is there excessive heat. The faces about are healthy country faces. And there are a good many faces too—some four thousand or so, had we seen them all. And female faces among them? Oh, yes, there is a fair amount of female labour employed, although not to the same extent as in some other manufactures; but in a department to itself, and employed in light work—wrapping up cakes for instance.

And the cake department, with its quietude and pleasant fragrance and the sight of all kinds of good things, is quite a rest and refreshment in contrast with the bustle we have passed through. The wholesale manufacture of cakes is a departure comparatively modern. People baked their cakes at home—sometimes with terrible results—or they ordered them of the confectioner a day or two beforehand. Now you send to the nearest shop for one of Huntley and Palmers', and will not, perhaps, regret the changes that time has wrought. There are all kinds of cakes in squadrons, being wrapped up in silver or lead paper, and arranged with a certain eye to effect, by the agile fingers of womankind. Here are school cakes and Eton cakes, cakes of Genoa, of Savoy, of Madeira, cakes of every description you ever heard of, and a good many that you never did hear of before. They are all on the march to be distributed throughout the country, to be packed in school-boys' boxes, to figure at cosy tea-tables, to visit alike the homes of rich and poor, to crown the banquet of Lucullus, and make a feast of delight for the humble sempstress.

But now the dinner bell is ringing, and hundreds of employes are hurrying away to their homes for the midday meal. There are many pleasant rows of small houses which are tenanted almost exclusively by the workmen of the biscuit factory; and many comfortable households and pleasant homes have been es-

tablished about the factory, and owe their comforts to it. Then there are numbers of young people and others who take their meals on the premises, where a room is provided for the purpose.

There is a reading-room also and a library within the works, and there is always accessible the excellent free library and reading-room established within the public buildings.

For summer evenings and holidays there is an excellent cricket club—one of the strongest of its class. Then there are pleasant public gardens close by, which are free to all, with a curious mount called the Forbury, once enclosed within the abbey precincts.

The Forbury is crowned with ancient elms; a Sebastopol gun stands sentinel on its summit; a Royal oak, planted on the Prince of Wales's marriage day, may be a fine young tree a hundred years hence; and you have a glimpse in the gardens beneath of the lion of Mainwand, in memory of the men of the Berkshire Regiment who fell in that disastrous battle. From the hill you get a pleasant view of the river valley where the Kennet, wandering in devious channels, unites at last and flows into Thamesis.

The abbey ruins are at hand—shapeless masses of grouted flints, and yet, formless as they are, imposing a certain sense of grandeur from their strength and thickness. After the abbey fell, the buildings were used as a palace. Queen Elizabeth came here often. She had her own seat, her State pew, with a canopy over, in the Church of St. Laurence—the church whose square tower, with its four comely pinnacles, rises close by. Then the place fell out of repair and was abandoned, its walls being used as a quarry by all the country round. It may have been damaged somewhat by the guns of Lord Essex and the Parliament forces, who besieged and captured the place during the Civil Wars. It was never a walled town; but there were palisades, ditches, and breastworks, and there was much cannonading and skirmishing with alarums, sorties, and surprises, till the King's forces were allowed to march out with the honours of war, and join their Royal master at Oxford.

There are many ancient memories, indeed, connected with Reading, the train of which might be pleasantly followed; but our business is rather with the Reading of to-day—the spirited modern town, with a High Street and Market Place which still

suggest a flavour of the quiet old market town of other days. But what would the old farmers, and maltsters, and millers of other days have said over their ale and pipes could they have seen the fine public buildings of to-day: the Town Hall—the new Town Hall—handsome and well proportioned, with a fine organ, and of almost perfect acoustic properties; the Museum, with its collections of art, and antiquity, and a promising collection of local relics. The Free Library and Reading Room have already been mentioned; they are in the same pile of buildings, cheerful, handsome rooms, where everything seems to be arranged in the most admirable way. And there is a constant stream of people moving about and a general cheerful air of intelligence and progress. Reading is clearly flourishing, and long may she so continue.

SOME SLANG PHRASES.

THE great bulk of common words, that is, words in everyday ordinary use, may be regarded as consisting of two classes, the colloquial and the literary. No hard and fast line can be drawn, separating one class from the other; but, roughly speaking, the division is sufficiently accurate. Attached to the colloquial section of the language are two important but ill-defined tributary classes of words; the larger is known as slang, while the smaller consists of dialectal forms and modes of speech. Interesting as both these classes are philologically, there are yet many other points of interest and instruction—historical and antiquarian—presented to the view of the student, and more especially in the case of slang and familiar words and phrases.

One of the oldest of our popular expressions is “by hook or by crook.” A variety of guesses, some extremely wild, have been made at the origin of the phrase. One connects it with the names of two judges in the time of Charles the First, named Hooke and Crooke; the idea being that what was lost by the ruling of the one might be gained by the decision of the other. But, unfortunately for this theory, the phrase is much older than Stuart times. Archbishop Parker, writing to Sir William Cecil in 1566, says of a certain Dr. Caius, that his pupils intended “to win him in time, by hook or crook, the master's room”; and two centuries earlier than this the expression occurs in the writings of Wiclif. The most pro-

bable explanation traces the origin of "hook or crook" to the old forest custom, in virtue of which the tenants of a feudal lord had the right of taking "fire-bote," or wood for firing, by hook and by crook. What could not be gathered with the hook might be reached and pulled down with the crook.

Another ancient expression, still occasionally used, is to "dine with Duke Humphrey," or, as it is now sometimes more shortly phrased, to "dine out," in both cases meaning not to dine at all. The old Cathedral of St. Paul's was in times past the regular meeting-place for business and for pleasure of the citizens. Within the professedly sacred walls traders met to bargain and to deal, gallants strutted up and down the centre aisle to exhibit the bravery of their apparel, advertisements were exhibited, servants hired, and assignments made. When the dinner hour came, the throng of business men and gay idlers speedily melted away until only the unfortunate ones, who had not the price of a dinner, remained, to walk out the interval and enjoy a Barmecide's feast, in the body of the church, where, it was mistakenly supposed, lay buried the bones of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, youngest son of Henry the Fourth, famous for his hospitality, and known as the good Duke Humphrey. Nashe, in "Pierce Penilesse," 1592, says, "I retired me to Paules, to seeke my dinner with Duke Humfrey." Dr. William Chambers, in his "Historical Sketch of St. Giles's Cathedral," Edinburgh, says that a similar pleasantry prevailed concerning the tomb of the Earl of Murray in that ancient building, and he quotes a minor Scotch poet named Sempill, who makes a hungry, penniless idler say :

I dined with saints and gentlemen,
E'en sweet Saint Giles and the Earl of Murray.

The adjective "Dutch," by what seems a somewhat curious caprice of popular taste, is used in a variety of common phrases, to denote something inferior, or to some extent contemptible. A "Dutch concert" is one wherein each man sings his own song, or each performer plays his own tune, at the same time that his comrades sing or play theirs. Scott uses the term in "Waverley," in describing the boisterous revelling that led up to the famous affray in Luckie Macleary's change-house. "Dutch courage," perhaps, refers in part to the "Hollands" which so often inspired the potvalour so characterised; but it is also, no

doubt, like other of these phrases, a witness to the long-standing hatred and enmity between the English and the Dutch.

The Dutch their wine and all their brandy lose,
Disarmed of that from which their courage grows,

says Waller. Fielding, in "Tom Jones," speaks of "Dutch defence," in the sense of sham defence. "Dutch," or "Double Dutch," is often used as a synonym for gibberish, especially nowadays with reference to the prattle of young children. "Dutch feast" is a phrase now obsolete; it was formerly applied to an entertainment where the host got drunk before his guests. "Dutch auctions" are well known.

In the "Daily Post" of April eleventh, 1724, there is a curious advertisement of such a sale, perhaps the first of the kind, though not under that name; forty-four paintings, "of the best Italian and other masters," are announced "to be sold by auction, after a new method, that is, by lowering down from the price set, till the first bidder speaks to have it at the last mentioned price."

A writer in the "East Anglian" of 1869, in a list of sea words and phrases in use on the Suffolk coast, has the following: "There were the squires on the bench, but I took heart, and talked to 'em like a Dutch uncle." The use of this not very intelligible phrase is by no means confined to the Suffolk coast. The expression often heard, "Thank Heaven it is no worse," is sometimes called "Dutch consolation."

"Blue" is a favourite adjective in slang phrases. Schoolboys, in their own choice dialect, talk of "blue fear" and "blue funk." The indefinite period known as "once in a blue moon" is a favourite with Miss Braddon, if one may judge by her frequent use of the expression. The moon will doubtless not be blue until the Greek Calends, or, as they say in Ireland, till "Tib's Eve," whenever that may be.

Swift, in his "Polite Conversation," a wonderful series of dialogues, crammed with the colloquialisms current in the early part of the last century, uses the strange expression, "to blush like a blue dog," meaning, not to blush at all. More than a century earlier, in the "Apologie for the School of Abuse," published in 1579, Stephen Gosson speaks with similar meaning of blushing "like a blacke dogge." Both expressions appear to be equally meaningless.

To drink "till all is blue" is an old-established euphemism for getting very

drunk. Ford, in the "Lady's Trial," 1639, says: "We can drink till all look blue."

The antiquity of some of the common street sayings and phrases is surprising. The elegant retort, "you're another!" is a case in point. Readers of "Pickwick" will remember the famous quarrel between the friends. "Sir," said Mr. Tupman, "you're a fellow." "Sir," said Mr. Pickwick, "you're another!" There is an amusing use of this expression in "Tom Jones." "You mistake me, friend," cries Partridge. "I did not mean to abuse the cloth; I only said your conclusion was a 'non sequitur.'" "You are another," cries the Sergeant, "an' you come to that. No more a 'sequitur' than yourself." But the saying is much older. In the earliest known regular English comedy, "Roister Doister," by Nicholas Udall, published about 1550, Ralph says: "If it were an other but thou, it were a knave;" to which his antagonist replies in latter-day phrase: "Ye are an other your selfe, sir." The common expression, "to know what's what," is also found in this early play.

When a tramp pursues his weary way along the dusty high-road, or a denizen of St. Giles's prowls about the streets, he would describe himself as "padding the hoof," but he would not know that he was using a phrase which, with slight alteration of the verb, dates from the time of Shakespeare. "Beat the hoof," is the older form; and, in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," Falstaff says to his page, Robin: "Trudge, plod away o' the hoof; seek shelter, pack!" Most street expressions and popular cries are not so intelligible nor so long-lived as those mentioned. Many of them are simply idiotic, and, after a very short career of popular favour, give place to others equally senseless. About twenty-five or six years ago, the "gamins" made the echoes ring with cries of, "How's your poor feet?"—a query to which no reply was expected, but which was supposed to be a masterpiece of wit and repartee. Many other equally imbecile questions and exclamations have since been familiar to the ears of Londoners.

A common saying, implying loss of appetite or absence of the necessary food wherewith to satisfy it, is, "all holiday at Peckham." Goldsmith, in the early part of his London life, passed some miserable months as usher in a school at Peckham, and the memory of this doleful period was ever bitter to him. Years afterwards, a friend in conversation happened to speak

facetiously of it being "all holiday at Peckham," and was surprised to find that this innocent reference to a recognised proverbial phrase was regarded by Goldsmith as an unkind allusion to his past misery, and, therefore, a personal insult.

Sometimes the fun in these facetious phrases is of rather a ghastly nature, as witness the euphemisms for death by hanging: "To wear a horse's night-cap," that is, a halter; "to dance upon nothing," and "to die in one's shoes." This last was a common saying in the seventeenth century; it occurs in Sir Thomas Urquhart's translation of Rabelais.

The humour in many other cant phrases for death is somewhat grim:

Be kind to those dear little folks,
When our toes are turn'd up to the daisies!

pleads the mother to the wicked uncle in the Ingoldsby Legend of the "Babes in the Wood."

In the older writers, the heels take the place of the toes. Dekker, in his "Wonderful Yeaere," 1603, speaking of a person attacked by the plague, says that she "had like to have turned up her heeles upon it;" and four years earlier, in Nashe's "Lenten Stuffe," there is a description of a great sickness at Yarmouth, when, "in one yeaere, seven thousand and fifty people toppled up their heeles there."

To "hop the twig," to "peg out," to "lay down one's knife and fork," and the like, are more flippant than humorous. To "hand in one's checks" is one of the many phrases, of playing-card origin, imported from Western America. To go "off the hooks," is a modern synonym for dying; but Mr. Pepys uses it with the meaning of vexed or out of sorts. In his "Diary," of May the twenty-sixth, 1665, he says: "In the evening by water to the Duke of Albemarle, whom I found mightily off the hooks, that the ships are not gone out of the River; which vexed me to see."

This quotation, like others given above, shows that many of our present-day slang phrases are simply modifications, and sometimes revivals, of older expressions of respectable parentage.

The elder Disraeli says, truly enough, that the revival of old words is the purest source of neology; but it is a matter of regret that so many of the revivals should have gone to swell the impure, philologically speaking, tide of slang.

EARLY TRAVELS IN ENGLAND.

RUMMAGING through an old library the other day, I came across two small books, giving an account of two Frenchmen's travels in England in 1663. They were interesting to me, and so, perhaps, I can make an epitome interesting to the general reader.

Now 1663 is a very remote date to us merely in years, but it is much more distant if we think of the knowledge possessed by either country of the other. To be sure, Englishmen of the higher classes had acquired some considerable information about France and the Continent generally, for we were then as we are now, fighters and wanderers; and political events, as we know, had for many years caused great influx of Englishmen into France; but these were, as I have said, chiefly of the higher classes. To the bulk of the people France was absolutely unknown. But to Frenchmen generally, England was as far off as America. Hardly any one but the Ambassador and his suite had ever crossed the Channel, and not one, it may be safely said, had ever thought of learning the language and studying the country. It was not till some seventy years after that the French could learn anything of us from the pen of one of themselves, who had stopped long enough to learn the language and study the nation from all points of view. This honour was reserved for Voltaire, whose "Letters on the English" first saw the light in 1733.

The two travellers of whom I am about to treat were named Sorbière and Monconys; both were men of education, and the latter a man of position, who came for a short visit as guardian of the Duc de Chevreuse; both were intimately associated with the rising band of natural philosophers who were afterwards to be the founders of the Académie des Sciences, and of whom the names at least of Mersenne, Gassendi, Roberval, and Pascal, will be known to many readers. Naturally also they were well acquainted with those of the English philosophers who were to be the founders of the Royal Society: Digby, Moray, Lord Brouncker, and Oldenburg, who, during the rule of Cromwell, had spent their time in Paris. Best known however of all these was the famous Hobbes, two of whose works Sorbière had already translated into French.

From this short notice we may safely

conclude that these were just the sort of men who should travel and bring back to their own country a sober and correct account of a foreign land. And so they were, but all their admirable qualities were useless from their ignorance of our language. They made each a stay of a few weeks only, saw, to be sure, all there was to see, and reported faithfully. But that is not a knowledge of a country. Imagine one of us spending a few weeks at Paris without knowing a word of French. What can we say? The Rue de Rivoli is long and straight; the Boulevards are very thronged; the Arc de Triomphe is very big; the Madeleine is a beautiful church; the Pont Neuf is not nearly as long as any of the London bridges; coachmen go to the right instead of the left; and such small beer. Very well, our two travellers are very much of this kind; let us take them as we find them, and be thankful to have a commonplace account of London just after the Restoration, and before the Fire and the Plague.

To read Sorbière's dedication to the King is to throw ourselves into a totally different atmosphere from that of to-day. He thanks him for the gratification he received six months ago, but thinks it better, instead of returning and prostrating himself at the King's feet, to hasten to foreign countries to publish the fact. And perhaps this was not the worst way, for he has spread in England and Holland the report of the King's munificence.

Politicians have asked him to speak of the Royal application to affairs, of his penetration, and of his judgement. The valiant have been glad to have confirmed the reports of his courage; good Catholics, of his piety; the great, of the splendour of his Court; the people, of his goodness; and the fair sex, of his good looks. Considering that the King was only twenty-four, and had managed affairs for two years only, this may certainly be considered rather high-flown language. But to our travels.

It seems that, in 1663, the only communication between Calais and Dover was by a small decked boat which went to and fro, twice a week, at five shillings a head.

Monconys and the Duke left at two p.m. and arrived between eight and nine. Sorbière was not so fortunate. He had been introduced to an English lady for whom the Duke of York had sent a vessel, and who asked him to cross with her. The passage took twelve hours, and he was sick

all the time—a very unfortunate though very usual occurrence.

He would naturally, therefore, be in no very philosophic frame of mind when he landed, and he was very much disgusted at his reception on English ground, for the children followed him, crying out: "A mounseer;" and when he showed a wish to get rid of them, they further proceeded to shout out: "French dog."

He makes the remark that, at Calais, new-comers are welcomed heartily, and the inhabitants show their good-nature by many officious acts. Here, however, nobody offered to do anything for him, but he was allowed to go his own way as best he chose.

The contrast is certainly great, but he very sensibly observes that perhaps his countrymen have themselves to blame in a great measure, as their fussy, excitable ways are so different from the serious and cold habits of the English, and the way they have of looking after themselves.

Monconny and the Duke posted to Gravesend, and thence got into a boat which had been waiting for them, and were quickly rowed up to London.

Sorbière was compelled to go by the stage waggon, which, drawn by six horses one in front of the other, and the driver walking alongside, seemed to him a wonderful sight.

The judicious reader will here, no doubt, reflect on his luck in being born in this century. Fancy going from Dover to Gravesend in a waggon—fifty-one mortal miles—at the rate of, I suppose, two miles an hour at most!

There is, however, one feature which is undeniable; you have plenty of opportunity of seeing the country. Sorbière is enthusiastic in praise of the scenery, the eternal verdure, the striking beauty of the apple and cherry orchards; nowhere is the grass so green, or the turf so smooth, and the trees are so plentiful as to give the district the appearance of a forest.

This would appear all the more beautiful by contrast with the route he had just followed in his own country. Everybody who has been to Paris by the regular way must have been struck by the dreariness of the journey from Calais inland. It is most unfortunate for the reputation of "La belle France," that the most travelled route should be so detestable. But the fact is, that not one in a hundred sees the best parts of France. The proper way is to go up the Seine to Paris, and then spend some time in Touraine, and along the Loire.

But everything comes to an end, even a waggon journey. Gravesend was reached at last, where a boat was taken to London. This had been for ages, and was for a century afterwards, the regular route to the city, being cheaper and safer than the journey by land, which led over Blackheath, where, as likely as not, a highwayman might be met with, and this contingency was avoided by going up the crowded river.

Both our travellers are amazed at the size of the river, the enormous traffic, the forest of masts everywhere visible, especially just below London Bridge (then the only one), and above all at the naval workshops, crowded with vessels of all sizes and all states of completion. Monconny was especially struck with the number of little vessels above the bridge, about three hundred he was told, called Botz if they have two men, Scholars if only one. The fare in the former was sixpence from the bridge to Westminster, or any part of the distance, however small; sculls were half the price. Everybody used them, and the traffic was enormous; it was so much more convenient than through the streets, for these were narrow and the pavement bad.

We must not forget that in those days the City and Westminster were far apart. You left the former by Temple Bar, and to Westminster was as far as from the Pont Neuf to Chaillot. The extent of the city was surprising; it was much larger and had more houses than Paris, but not as many people. This is not surprising when we recollect that then, as now, the rule with us is one house one family, whereas in Paris, one house contained an indefinite number. It took two hours to walk from one end to the other, and three-quarters to walk across. Sorbière put up at first in Commun (Covent) Garden, which is the best situation for Frenchmen, who have more to do with the Court than with the Exchange; but he appears to have soon got into apartments, very good rooms on the first floor near Salisbury House, where Hobbes was then living with his patron, the Earl of Devonshire; for these he paid a crown a week.

The best view of the city was to be got from the river; the houses were numberless, but without architecture; plenty of gardens, the sole ornamentation of which consisted of grass plots, wonderfully green and smooth beyond description. This latter was the effect of rolling by means of stone cylinders

dragged by one or two men, which must have been a new experience to both our travellers, as they mention them more than once. It is certainly interesting to notice the effect produced by our commonplace garden-roller.

We get a long description of Westminster Abbey, which we need not repeat. St. Paul's would be magnificent, if it were not half in ruins, having served as stables and magazines for Cromwell's cavalry. All about it was the booksellers' quarter, but they were by no means confined to this part, as the trade was spread all over the city.

A few days after their arrival, Monconny's and the Duke went to High Park, a mile out of the city, to see the King reviewing some of his cavalry, after which they adjourned to Whitehall to salute His Majesty. The Queen was not pretty, but looked pleasant and good-tempered. The Duchess of York was ugly, and had a very large mouth and red eyes, but was very good-natured and spoke French well. Her mother was there, standing like everybody else. Thence to St. James's Park, where was a collection of beasts and birds. The latest arrival was an Indian bird called a "quessa ouarroe," the size and shape of an ostrich. For the benefit of the unlearned in French, it may perhaps be well to say that this peculiar spelling represents our cassowary.

The King, as is well known, took much interest in natural history, and in experiments of all kinds. This is confirmed by our travellers, who tell us of His Majesty going twice to see a man and a woman dissected. It was through this taste that the Royal Society had the King's favours bestowed on it, and received its charter, at the first reading of which Sorbière assisted, and gives an account of the proceedings, and a description of the document. He had also the honour of being admitted a Fellow, and his name is accordingly found in the list of members till his death in 1670. Sir Robert Moray presented him to the King, who took him to a meeting of the Society, placed him next to himself, and explained the proceedings as they went on. The meetings were then held in Gresham College every Wednesday. It is curious to read the sort of thing that was regularly brought before that learned body. It is enough to make one burst out laughing; but then comes the reflection that natural science was then in its infancy, and its votaries were groping

in the dark, honestly and patiently attempting in any and every way to get to light. From this point of view nothing can be more interesting than the early proceedings of the Royal Society. At one of the meetings it was reported that there is a lake in Ireland into which if a long stick is inserted, and left there a year or so, the part which penetrates the bottom becomes metallic, that in the water becomes petrified, and that in the air undergoes no change. Monconny's received confirmation from a compatriot of his own who had seen one of these wonderful sticks, and told him in addition that the lake was Lough Erne, and that when in a boat you could see down below the towers and steeples of a submerged town.

It was further reported that toads, vipers, and other venomous creatures could not live in Ireland, and an experiment had been made by bringing them from England on their native earth, on attempting to leave which and crawl on Irish ground, they turned back, and after doing so several times, finally died. The great hall of Whitehall had all its carpentry of Irish wood, consequently not a spider in it; and they say if one touches the wood it immediately drops dead. Visiting the same building again, Monconny's looked out carefully for spiders, and he certainly did see some, but they were not on the wood.

The King had recently put up a mast in St. James's Park for a telescope, through which Sir Robert Moray showed his friends Saturn and the satellites of Jupiter. We must here remember that these early telescopes were of very great length, and to suspend them from a tall mast was a very natural proceeding. It is worthy of remark that the best opticians were English, and that Bailey in St. Paul's Churchyard had the greatest reputation. Telescopes for ordinary purposes were six pounds each, and a pair of spectacles four shillings.

One day was partly taken up by seeing the King touch for the evil. Each patient was given a gold piece, which he was obliged to keep, or his complaint returned. Monconny's was told that one sufferer who had been cured, and afterwards lost his piece, had a renewal of the disorder. They gave him many instances of the cure, because, as he naively says, he doubted much. A gentleman and a lady assured him that when the late King was in custody, a man asked to be touched. The

soldiers refusing, the King called out that he prayed he might enjoy the virtue of his power as much as if he had been touched; which so happened, and the man was cured.

Another day was given to sport. One of the Jermyns, a nephew of Lord St. Albans, had made a bet that he would ride on one horse eighteen miles in an hour, and he did it in fifty-five minutes. Another did twenty miles in the same time, and wanted to bet he would do it again right off on the same horse; but nobody appears to have taken him. Then they went to see a bout at cudgel-playing, which was a novel sight, and not unpleasing; but the impression it left was that the whole affair was arranged by the combatants beforehand—a pretty good proof that “plants” and “crosses” can lay claim to a respectable antiquity. Then followed an amusement of which we have all heard a good deal, but of which nobody has any very detailed notion. This was a bear-baiting. Bruin, it seems, was securely fastened by the nose, and, when the dogs got fast hold of him they were got off by sticking thick cudgels in their mouths and pulling hard at their tails.

This sorry diversion—as Monconny calls it—was soon at an end, and, in place of the bear, appeared a bull, who was fastened by a strong rope round the neck to a stout post and had his horns covered. But, for all that, he tossed all the dogs who got near enough, and made them throw five or six summersaults, after which they fell on the ground or amongst the spectators. They would not, however, be beaten for all that, and never failed to rush at the bull again, and sometimes managed to get hold of an ear. This was a much more agreeable diversion than the first, but was itself infinitely surpassed by a monkey on a pony, which, when chivied by the dogs, ran about and sometimes tumbled, without the monkey ever letting go, and not seldom the pony rushed amongst the spectators and upset them and itself as well.

Another day they went to see the King and Queen at dinner, which was served under an embroidered dais in a great hall, into which anybody could enter and see what was going on, for the doors were always open, and people of whatever rank had nothing to do but walk into the audience chamber. Even when the King was hunting the peasants got on their horses and hunted with him.

It is pretty generally known that our forefathers began hunting earlier and kept it up later than we do now; but it is rather astonishing to find that the Royal pack met at four o'clock in the morning.

In the evening the strangers went to a small ball given by the Queen at Whitehall. It lasted till midnight—a Cinderella evidently. In the middle the King arrived and took the Queen as partner, who next took the Duc de Chevreuse, the King then leading out Lady Castlemaine. The ball began with a branle, as in France, and then followed courantes and other dances. When the King or Queen danced, all the ladies stood up; and, when the Duke of York danced, the ladies rose when he began and then sat down again. The hall was lighted by a great number of lights in silver candlesticks, placed on the mantelpiece, and by eight or ten beefeaters, who stood against the walls and held up large white candles.

Our travellers naturally paid a visit to the theatre. We are not told which of the two or three then open, or what was the play; but it is gratifying to find Monconny saying that it was the cleanest and most beautiful he had ever seen, hung all round with green baize, and the boxes lined with gilt leather. All the benches in the pit—where the people of condition sit—were ranged in an amphitheatre, each higher than the one in front. The change of scene and the machinery were most ingeniously invented and carried out. It is interesting to compare what Pepys says in his Diary under date of February the first, 1661:

“Thence to the theatre, and there sat in the pitt among the company of fine ladys,” etc.; and on May the ninth, 1663: “We home by water, having been a little shamed that my wife and woman were in such a pickle, all the ladies being finer and better dressed in the pitt than they used, I think.”

Three of our travellers went to Oxford in a carriage at ten shillings a head. They slept at Wykeham, twenty-seven miles from London, where they noticed that though only a village, there were elaborately ornamented sign-boards, which projected into the middle of the street, so as to prevent carriages passing except at the sides. They were told this was the custom all through the country, as they might judge for themselves in London, where the well-known sign of the Moon cost one hundred and twenty pounds, and that of the Crescent, one

hundred pounds. The journey took them from eleven to half-past eight. They did the other twenty miles next day. They had introductions to Wallis, the celebrated professor of mathematics, under whose guidance they saw everybody and everything of note in the University, of which they gave a long and accurate description. On one of the days, which must have been a Sunday, they went to Christ Church to hear a sermon, then to dinner with Wallis, thence to St. Mary's for another sermon, and then later on to Christ Church, to hear vespers, of all which they did not understand one word.

They did not fail to notice the big brazen nose at the door of one of the Colleges, and were told that Duns Scotus taught there, and so they put his nose up as a remembrance. They saw a pen and ink portrait of the late King, which was very rarely shown, every line in which was made up of the Psalms in Latin, in the minutest writing possible. This is of course that mentioned by Addison, in the 58th "Spectator":

"When I was last at Oxford, I perused one of the whisks and was reading the other, but could not go so far in it as I would have done, by reason of the impatience of my friends and fellow travellers, who all of them pressed to see such a piece of curiosity. I have since heard that there is now an eminent writing master in town who has transcribed all the Old Testament in a full-bottomed periwig; and if the fashion should introduce the thick kind of wigs which were in vogue some few years ago, he promises to add two or three supernumerary locks that shall contain all the Apocrypha. He designed this wig originally for King William, having disposed of the two Books of Kings in the two forks of the foretop; but that glorious monarch dying before the wig was finished, there is a space left in it for the face of any one that has a mind to purchase it."

RED TOWERS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Gerald," "Alicia," etc., etc.

PART II.

CHAPTER VI. "JOUR DE FÊTE."

SUNDAY morning was quite still, and intensely hot, even between nine and ten o'clock, when château and village were preparing to go to mass. The sky was

deep blue; only on the horizon lay a great rampart of white cloud, threatening storm; but nobody thought of that. Colour, light, shadow, were all vivid in a most transparent air; the scent of white acacia flowers hovered about the old buildings.

When Captain Percival came out of the house, strolling up and down the terrace, and looking about him, the dogs that were lying in the sun got up slowly and crept away towards the yard. In the house there was a noise of shutters and bars; but since old Pierre brought him his coffee, Vincent had not seen a human being about the place. Now, however, in the sunny distance, from the shade of the great chestnuts behind the left-hand wall to the deeper shade of the avenue, a string of people began slowly passing; women in black dresses, men in clean blue blouses and shiny caps. Their laughing chatter reached the Englishman's ears as he stood on the terrace, till it was lost in the not unmusical jangle of the church bells, suddenly beginning again. Then a young, sweet voice cried out:

"Suzanne, Suzanne! Make haste! I want you to come with me;" and Antoinette stepped out into the sunshine.

Then her dark eyes fell rather gravely on Vincent, and she made him a little bow.

"Good-morning, monsieur," she said.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle," said Vincent, lifting his hat as he came forward. "What a jolly day! Where's Celia? Do you know?"

"She has not come down yet. She will be here directly."

"I was just thinking how tremendously lonely this place was," said Vincent, by way of making himself agreeable, "when I saw a whole string of people crossing your avenue down there. There they go—more of them. Is there a right of way? That must be rather a bore, I should think."

"I don't know," said Antoinette. "Some of them come from the farm, and some more from farms and cottages away in the little lanes, among the woods and heaths up there. It is their shortest way to church, you see. If they did not cross our avenue, they would have to go a long way round by the high road."

"And your father can't stop them?"

"Mais si!" said Antoinette, opening her eyes. "He could stop them, no doubt, if he chose. But why should he? That would not be right, to give the poor people so much extra fatigue."

"Right! well, that depends on the point of view," said Vincent, with a slight grin. "It would be right to himself, and to his family, and his successors, to put a stop to a nuisance like that without further fuss. A path made by the peasants within a couple of hundred yards of one's front door! If the place belonged to me I should object to it strongly. Why, let them go round by the high road. What is the high road for, except to take people from place to place? But perhaps your father goes in for being popular with the peasants?"

"Of course, he likes them to like him," said Antoinette, after listening with some surprise. "But that is not the reason——"

"Ah, of course, there comes in the weak point. That is how you French people lost everything before; and you will lose it again, not knowing how to stand up for your own rights."

Vincent spoke almost angrily. Mademoiselle de Montmirail looked at him, then looked at the distant passing figures, and laughed.

"That is your opinion?" she said.

Suzanne did not come, and there were no signs of Celia. Antoinette looked up at the house a little impatiently, as the bells went on ringing. She could not start off to church by herself, and therefore, at this moment, escape from the Englishman seemed impossible.

"Are you in a hurry?" he said. "You won't have anybody at church with that fair going on."

"Pardon! It does not begin till mass is over. Everybody goes to church in the morning."

"You don't say so! What very good people! Or are they afraid of the Curé? Does he send them all to perdition in his sermons?"

"The people are not better than in other places, but they know it is their duty to go to church," said Antoinette. "No, I don't think the Curé frightens them. He is very good; they like him. Of course he detests the fête, because it disturbs everything, and makes it much harder for them. The people who come with the shows and lotteries are often 'méchants.' But it must be—and, after all, it is a very pretty sight, especially in the evening."

"A village fair is not often a pretty sight in the evening," said Vincent.

"My father says they manage these things differently in England."

"I suppose we do. Perhaps there is more human nature in English people. But really you are not going to persuade me that Anjou and Arcadia are the same thing."

"I don't know," she said, smiling. "But we shall go down to the village to-night, after it is dark—if my father comes home in time to take us—and then you will see how nice the people are."

Vincent looked at her curiously. He did not admire the girl; she was far too noble a type for him; and yet he rather wished to make friends with her. He saw that La Tour Blanche might often be a pleasant change from England and Woolsborough; and he thought he might as well be welcome to its inhabitants. Of the constant friendship of its mistress he felt tolerably sure, though hardly knowing why. It seemed to him that in spite of herself, in spite of fate, in spite of circumstances, she must be nearer to him than to these French people, though she had chosen to pass her life with them. One thing, at any rate, was clear; life away from Celia was a dull, uninteresting concern. Though last night he had parted with her half in anger, this morning he had got up with the one idea of seeing her again. Foolish and wrong, yes; but in Vincent's way of arguing, he had a full right to burn his own fingers if he chose; and so, as Antoinette de Montmirail was so nearly connected with Celia, he was beginning to think it better that she should not dislike him.

"Mon Dieu, we shall be late," exclaimed the girl, with an impatient shrug, as the bells, which had stopped for a few minutes, began a different chime. "Ah, there you are, Suzanne! Come, come, I am not going to wait for maman. Let us go on."

Suzanne stumped serenely across the terrace. She looked handsome and agreeable, dressed in black, her broad face surmounted by a gorgeous bonnet covered with flowers. It was now several years since Suzanne had ceased to wear her white frilled cap on Sundays.

"Plenty of time, mademoiselle," she said. "Madame la Marquise is coming directly."

"Never mind; I am going with you," said Antoinette; and they walked quickly away together.

Suzanne looked back once or twice—to see if madame was coming—she explained to Antoinette.

"Don't disturb yourself; of course she will come," said the girl, a little proudly.

"And the English gentleman too?"

"I should think not. He seems to have no religion. I suppose it won't do to say I hope not," said Antoinette, laughing a little. "Because it might do him good. But it would distract me very much to see him in church."

"And me too!" exclaimed the old nurse. "It is a pity, is it not, mademoiselle, that such a gentleman should have come to the château while M. le Marquis was away? He is not a very good companion for madame and mademoiselle. M. le Marquis likes the English, I know; but this must be one of a bad sort. Pierre says so, and Pierre is sharp enough, considering his age."

Suzanne glanced aside at her young mistress, and pinched her mouth up wisely. She was not going to give her more than the faintest hint of Pierre's opinion. Pierre had in fact spoken plainly to his wife the night before. He was a man of the world, and Captain Percival had not been in the house half an hour, before the old servant's suspicions had gathered like a cloud round his head.

"My father is coming back to-night, you know," said Antoinette.

"C'est bien!" said Suzanne heartily. Then she listened with an indulgent smile as the girl went on.

"Yes, he is certainly disagreeable, but he must be nicer than he seems, because he is maman's cousin, you know, and such an old friend of hers. It is so difficult to understand foreigners. Don't you see, Suzanne, I suppose that what we think rude and nasty, they think polite and nice. Our customs are very often quite contrary; just as my father says, that in England you keep on the left side of the road when you are driving."

"Is it possible, mademoiselle! But how awkward, how puzzling for the horses!"

Antoinette laughed. "I suppose they don't find it so," she said.

"What mademoiselle says is all very well," said Suzanne, nodding her head violently a great many times. "But she will not persuade me that this gentleman is like the English cousins of Monsieur le Marquis, for instance—or that monsieur would be so fond of the English, if they were all like this."

"Perhaps not," said Antoinette. "But now let us say no more, my dear Suzanne; because you see he is connected with us; and, after all, disagreeable people are not always bad."

Suzanne shrugged her shoulders.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "I have with my own ears heard madame your grandmother say, that a good heart and good manners were the same thing. How often have I told that, as a warning, to my poor old Pierre, when his temper was not quite as it should be!"

"I don't think grandmamma was the first person to say that," said Antoinette.

"Anyhow, it was Madame la Vicomtesse who said it in my hearing, and I have never forgotten it," persisted Suzanne. "And another thing I am sure of, that this English Captain would not have pleased Madame la Vicomtesse. He is not the sort of person she would have liked to see in company with mademoiselle."

"Well," said Antoinette, with an impatient little sigh, "I said we would talk no more about him. Tell me about the fête. Is it going to be a good one, do you know? Shall I turn the wheels for you, and win a few cups and saucers?"

They had by this time reached the lower end of the avenue, where it opened on a road edged with poplars, leading along by the river-side. Under the trees the brown earth was covered with what looked like a soft shower of snow-flakes: the downy blossoms of the trees, which came floating down almost without a breath of wind to move them. Antoinette stooped to pick up one or two of the light white feathers, and she and Suzanne both turned at the same moment and looked back up the avenue. The marquise and her English cousin were walking slowly down through the shadows and the trembling, varied sunbeams.

"Coming, after all!" muttered Suzanne; but Antoinette did not speak; she only walked on a little faster, and presently seemed to forget these things in delighted amusement at the gay booths with which the village street was lined from end to end.

"You and I will come down this afternoon," she said; "that is the best time for buying. And then, after dinner, papa will be here, and we can all come down together."

They walked on towards the church steps, where the villagers were standing about in groups, talking, while a few were slowly going into church. From inside the doors came a sound of singing of litanies; it was hardly time yet for the mass to begin. All the village faces in the sunshine looked smiling and pleasant; the

men's blouses looked stiff and new, the women's caps even whiter than usual, in honour of the fête. Last year it had rained; this year their village was highly favoured.

Antoinette spoke to a few of her special friends, and smiled and nodded to others. Her young, bright face was full of sweetness, especially for the quaint little children who crowded round. Though so unlike her father in appearance, she had all the simple charm of manner which made him so popular among the peasants.

"Monsieur le Capitaine has turned back; there is madame coming alone," Suzanne said to her as she was going on up the steps to the church door.

"Ah, we will go back," the girl said quickly; and she set off walking so fast that Suzanne, who was fat, could hardly keep up with her. Presently she turned back, feeling herself no longer necessary, as mademoiselle had joined her step-mother. The excellent Suzanne looked annoyed, and went into church muttering, with a cloud on her charming face.

"You were in a great hurry, petite," said Celia, who was looking as fair and serene as usual. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

"I thought the bells had changed," said Antoinette, a little disturbed. "And then, when I first called Suzanne, I thought monsieur your cousin was coming too; and when she came I thought I had better go with her."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Celia lazily. "Monsieur my cousin does not care for our services, you see."

"He is, perhaps, not exactly a Christian," said Antoinette after a little pause, with a sort of awe in her voice.

Celia laughed.

"My dear child, what extraordinary things you say! He would be amused. His father is next door to a Bishop in the English Church, and you accuse him of not being a Christian. You must remember that very few men are as good as your father, Netta."

"Ah, indeed, no!" cried the girl triumphantly. "What happiness that he is coming home to-night!" she said, looking brightly into Celia's face.

"Yes; it seems a long time since he went away," answered Celia.

She was never ecstatic. Sometimes Antoinette could admire her quietness, the steady and comfortable way in which she took most things that happened. Once or

twice the girl had even distrusted her own eager feelings; they seemed shallow and worthless beside that calm smile of Celia's, which suggested depths it seemed to hide, and put all hopes, and longings, and regrets, on their own proper level. Yet, somehow, Celia's words that morning fell a little coldly on Antoinette's heart; and she could not quite reprove and comfort herself in the old way, with the old fiction: "But she is his wife; of course she must love him even better than I do."

The slight impression soon wore off, however, and after the service, Antoinette felt happy enough, though Captain Percival was loitering in the avenue, waiting for them.

He and Celia had plenty to say to each other, and Antoinette disliked his presence a little less when she was not obliged to talk to him. After breakfast they all went out again in the glorious sunshine, with the dogs, and wandered round the still half-ruinous precincts of the old place. Vincent had a way of openly contrasting everything he saw with the English fashion of farming, gardening, wood-craft, building, and so on, very much to the disadvantage of France. Antoinette thought all this anything but polite or amiable, and devoted herself to the dogs, while Celia argued with her cousin in a peaceful, lazy way. Perhaps half his remarks were made for the pleasure of being contradicted, and of indulging the peculiar kind of impertinence which was almost his native air.

Antoinette had not been brought up in a way to make her understand this; and in her simple heart she believed that he meant earnestly all he said. Her father's frank straightforwardness had not trained her to understand the talk of the Vincent Percival kind of man. She was glad enough to leave him to Celia, while she made excursions with the dogs wherever their fancy led them, round the bright vineyards, through the young chestnut woods, along by the wild straggling hedges with their golden broom and wild roses. The others did not trouble themselves about her, any more than if she had been a child or a dog. Vincent was looking at Celia, when he was not finding fault with the things she showed him. Celia seemed a little more lively and active than was usual with her now; she laughed; her answers to his cool remarks had something of the life and spirit of five years ago; her cheeks had a touch of lovely pink, and her eyes were as blue as the sky. She and

her companion walked on rather quickly at last, and were standing on the terrace when Antoinette came up to them with a cluster of yellow roses in her hand.

"These are for you," she said to Celia. "The tree in my garden is covered with them."

"Thanks, dear child," said Celia graciously.

"Have you a garden of your own, made-moiselle? How charming!" said Vincent, and he stretched out his hand for a rose, which Celia gave him. "You ought to grow these roses for yourself, though, not for Madame de Montmirail. They suit your complexion and not hers."

"I don't grow them for anybody—but she likes them," Antoinette answered rather stiffly; and then Celia interposed.

"Have you enjoyed your walk, Antoinette? Are you tired? You have been running about with the dogs everywhere."

"Yes, maman, I have enjoyed it very much; the day is perfect. And you?"

"If looks tell the truth——" began Vincent.

Antoinette did not quite see why he should answer for Celia; but it was necessary to listen to him, and Celia glanced up and laughed.

"Looks? What do you mean?" she said to Vincent.

"Ah, maman, he means that you are looking even more beautiful than usual," murmured Antoinette. "Papa would say so if he were here."

"Don't flatter me," said Celia. "Come, you are both talking nonsense. I am tired. I shall go in."

"I have seen you look like this before," said Vincent deliberately, staring at her. "Once in a garden, by a river, when you chose to go in for being a witch. You looked as you do now, and awfully happy, which you were, too, though there was a poor devil at the other end——"

As he spoke, Celia turned pale to the lips, though she looked at him steadily.

"Yes, the dear old garden at River Gate," she said, "how pretty it used to be in the evening. My memory is not so good as yours, though, and I think I was always awfully happy; and there were plenty of other children, besides me, who used to like playing at witches. Now I am going in; and I advise you to smoke, and meditate a little. Come, Antoinette."

Captain Percival found himself left alone

upon the terrace, where there was now a little shade. He sat down on a bench, but he did not smoke, and his meditations were not particularly sweet. He was inclined to call himself a fool; had he been short-sighted enough to make Celia angry? There was a kind of enjoyment in it, too, for a nature like his; quarrelling with her might be better than a cold, painful pretence of being "the worldly friends of every day." He told himself, truly, that he could not manage to be a humbug, an actor, like Celia herself. And yet, by thus making her angry, he felt that he risked losing even the friendship which she seemed willing to let him keep. As he sat there on the terrace, listening to a distant sound of gay dance music in the village, he half expected Celia to come out of the house again, having disposed of her young step-daughter, with the intention of telling him that he had better go away the next morning. He must agree with her; it would be much better; but he would at any rate, indulge himself by telling her a few truths before he went. A fine scene, indeed, was prepared for Celia in the thoughts of this troublesome old lover of hers; and when, after some minutes, he heard the house-door open, he got up and turned that way with a slight feeling of triumph.

But it was not Celia, after all; only the child Antoinette, with her old Suzanne in attendance.

"Are you off for another walk?" he said, speaking quite gently in his disappointment.

"We are going to vespers," said Antoinette; "and after that to see the fête."

As she spoke, the church bells began to chime.

"May I go with you?" said Vincent, he did not know why.

"No," said Antoinette, shaking her head with a slightly puzzled smile. "Maman says you will admire it more in the evening."

"And maman is always right?"

"But always!" Antoinette answered gravely; and then she and the old nurse went on her way, and Vincent returned to his bench.

"Always right—never in the wrong—trust you for that, Madame la Marquise!" he muttered to himself, as he sat waiting for Celia.

But Celia did not come.